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SUBJECT: CHAVEZ CALLS PRESIDENT OBAMA "IGNORANT", STILL
PEEVED ABOUT PERCEIVED U.S. SLIGHTS

REF: CARACAS 000355

Classified By: A/POLITICAL COUNSELOR DANIEL LAWTON,
FOR REASON 1.4(D)

11. (C) Summary: President Chavez attacked the Obama administration again March 22, two days after Representative William Delahunt encouraged the Venezuelan president to push the "reset" button on bilateral relations (Reftel). Chavez also accused the United States of backing "separatist" plans of opposition-led state governments. Chavez's complaints -- including President Obama's January Univision interview, the 2009 Human Rights and International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), and unspecified comments by the Secretary -- indicate that the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (GBRV) will continue making improving relations conditional on the United States refraining from criticizing Chavez or his administration. End Summary.

CHAVEZ ATTACKS OBAMA, OPPOSITION

12. (SBU) In his weekly Sunday "Alo, Presidente" TV broadcast March 22 from Guarico State, Chavez again attacked President Obama for what he perceives as U.S. criticism of his administration, calling Obama an "unfortunate ignorant man" ("pobre ignorante"). The Venezuelan president asserted that the new U.S. administration needs to "respect" all Latin American countries equally in order to improve relations with in the region, beginning with Cuba. Chavez claimed that he had selected a new ambassadorial appointee to Washington in the run-up to Obama's inauguration, in order to "send a signal," but "put the appointment in the desk drawer" after Obama's purported attacks -- a reference to Obama's pre-inauguration interview with Spanish-language Univision TV. Chavez complained that "(the US) keeps making me out to be a bad boy... when I've never shown criticism of Obama. It was Obama who began the first attack." Chavez added that he had shared these alleged attacks with Representative Delahunt during his March 19 meeting with the Venezuelan President (Reftel).

13. (SBU) In the same broadcast, Chavez accused the United States of exporting terrorism and suggested that the United States will "end up being a paper tiger." He urged the United States to follow China's example to become "a great power for the good, a great power for progress, a great power for development." Chavez also alleged that five states led by opposition governors (Tachira, Zulia, Miranda, Carabobo, and Nueva Esparta) are supported by mafiosos, had "separatist pretensions," and "want the head of Chavez." He threatened that the opposition governors would not succeed because he was backed by both popular and military support. Chavez

alleged that the "half-moon" plot, in reference to the western states of Zulia and Tachira which form a half-moon shape, is "an old project propelled by the yankee empire." He called on Minister of Public Works Diosdado Cabello to maintain a "firm hand" in taking over the ports and airports in opposition-controlled states.

Comment

¶4. (C) Chavez's rhetorical attacks on the President and the United States once again demonstrate his enduring intolerance to any perceived criticism from the USG, despite Representative Delahunt's efforts to persuade Chavez to "reset" bilateral relations. Chavez remains more interested in the appearance of dialogue with the USG, particularly with the legislative branch, than they are in engaging in real efforts to improve relations. It is also revealing that the Venezuelan president apparently believed he could decree the restoration of diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level without any prior bilateral discussions. Chavez's unfounded accusations against the opposition's alleged, U.S.-backed "secessionist" plot are not new, but they are consistent with his determined efforts to undermine opposition state and local governments elected in November ¶2008.

CAULFIELD